

Co-chairs Senator McCrory and Representative Currey, Ranking Members Representative McCarty and Representative Berthel, and distinguished members of the Education Committee:

My name is Abby Dawson and I live in New London, CT . I am testifying in support of S.B. 1095: An Act Concerning School Resource Officers.

All students deserve to feel safe, secure, and supported in their places of learning. Yet too often our schools rely on policing to keep children in line, rather than funding professionals trained to deliver students necessary developmental and behavioral health resources.

Growing up, I was privileged enough to attend a private school. I was also privileged enough to go through a school experience without the presence of an SRO, rather we had an abundance of school counselors and psychologists. Because of this, I had a very positive school experience and I felt safe every time I walked in the building. There was an overall culture of safety that was created just knowing we all had the proper resources around us.

This bill calls for non-security responses to non-violent actions. This means that actions that are objectively seen as non-violent, such as violating dress code, a student raising their voice at an inappropriate time/manner, fidgeting, etc, will not require a POLICE OFFICER to mediate the situation. Most of the time, police officers are not trained to mediate psychological and behavioral outbursts like these, as most police academies only train for less than 6 months. The police are trained to deal with VIOLENT crime only. In non-violent scenarios, it is best for the teacher to call a school counselor or well-being specialist to mediate the situation, as these roles require extensive training and will prevent the child from being traumatized by improper handling of a situation.

It is imperative to note that black and brown students are much more likely to be targeted by School Resource Officers (the police) because of cultural differences that they are not used to, because the vast majority of police officers are white. For example, in a study conducted by the CT Post in 2020, it revealed that in Hartford, only about 11.5% of their police department is black, while the city has a 36% black population. This is a very large disparity that is not representative of the community, and a statistic like this cannot go unnoticed. While School Resource officers will remain in schools, it is imperative that they receive cultural diversity training and receive non-violent mediation training. These children are young and impressionable. We need to discontinue creating a culture of fear and intimidation at a place where students are supposed to learn and grow into themselves.

Students deserve to feel safe at school and to have the proper people handle and mediate non-violent actions. The presence of SROs who are not trained in such skills is traumatizing both for the student engaging in non-violent behaviors and the students around them. I ask that you

please consider my view on this subject as a psychology major, a student, and a white person who has been unaffected by this issue but has educated themselves on the repercussions it has caused for many of my black and brown peers.

According to research by Connecticut Voices for Children, there's no evidence School Resource Officers (SROs) make students or staff safer, but schools with SROs have more arrests and more expulsions than their peer institutions without SROs.

I strongly support S.B. 1095. I hope the Committee and Connecticut lawmakers will vote in favor of this bill. Together, we can build an educational system that centers students' social-emotional well-being through care, resources, learning, and restoration.

Thank you for your time,

Abby Dawson